
Program Evaluation

Evaluation is a form of disciplined inquiry, the purpose of which is to produce information to assist in making informed value judgments about a program (Carolyn Callahan, 1992) for the purpose of improving the program under evaluation (James Borland, 1989).

This definition of evaluation contains several key elements which we will examine to gain an understanding of the process.

Disciplined inquiry—an exemplary evaluation shall involve a high degree of academic rigor (i.e., how you know what you know) and shall be characterized by its publicness.

Produce information to assist in making informed value judgments—the information collected shall be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the program (i.e., its goodness, badness, does it work, does it not work, why, and how).

Purpose of improving the program under evaluation—the information collected shall be used for program renewal/improvement.

What are the purposes of evaluation?

What are some questions you might ask?

During planning (or formative evaluation):

✓ to document the need for the program

Why implement this program in the first place?

✓ to document the case for the particular program approach

What makes you believe the approach you have advocated (e.g., comprehensive programming model vs. pull-out model) will work?

✓ to document the feasibility of implementing the program

What makes you believe that given available resources, the program can be implemented as intended?

*We must not cease
from exploration
and the end of all
our exploring will
be to arrive where
we began and to
know the place for
the first time.
—T.S. Eliot*

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While the program is in progress (formative evaluation):

✓ to document the fact the program is being implemented

Does the program exist in fact as well as on paper?

✓ to assist in the identification of program strengths/weaknesses

What parts of the program appear to be working and what parts appear not to be working?

✓ to generate information to assist in making in progress revisions of the program

What needs to be changed and what are some alternative ways of changing it?

After the program has been developed (summative evaluation):

✓ to document the results/impacts of the program in terms of:

- (A) students
- (B) program staff
- (C) regular school personnel
- (D) parents
- (E) community
- (F) the institution or school system

What are the effects of this program?

✓ to document the results/impacts for

- (A) funding agents, and
- (B) potential adopters

Can this program work in other settings?

Was this program worth the money?

—Carolyn Callahan, 1992

How do you evaluate a program?

Program Description

This is the key piece on which the program will be evaluated. It will provide the standard against which comparisons can be made and will provide the operational plan of the program.

Steps in Evaluating the Program Description

1. Determine the “boundary “ of the program. Give it a name, describe its general process, list its major resource conditions and major goals.
2. Analyze the program into 3-7 major functional components—examples include: Identification of students, program development and management, staff development, curriculum development, instruction, evaluation, etc. Describe the major function of each, and identify the essential resource requirements, the processes or activities which happen as part of the component, and the component objectives.
3. Complete a finer level analysis of each component (i.e., break it into sub-components). Ensure that every function of the component is subsumed into one of the sub-components.
4. Check the comprehensiveness and logical organization of the design. Does it represent the intended operation of the program? Are all activities of the program described? Are all of the objectives of the program stated as outcomes?

Note: Ensure that each component is in fact a function. A function is a process that produces outputs and consumes inputs.

—Carolyn Callahan, 1992

It is not possible to evaluate that which you cannot describe.
—Carolyn Callahan

Who does the program evaluation?

Program evaluation is always taking place on some level. It may be by the parents in the stands during the basketball game, by the teachers in the lounge during lunch, or by the students after they have been asked to make up work they missed while being out of the room. These are areas of concern which usually focus on one small part of a program and need to be addressed on an ongoing basis.

A summative evaluation, such as we are addressing, should be completed every 4-5 years or when any great change occurs. Often an outside evaluator is invited to

*An evaluator is best
regarded not as a
judge or a referee
but as “an educator
(whose) success is to
be judged by what
others learn”
—Cronbach, in
Borland, 1989,
p.200
57*

conduct the evaluation but the Steering Committee may accomplish the task. It must be noted that this is an intense activity demanding a high degree of academic rigor and support through resources of both time and money.

The following recommendations by David M. Fetterman and the National Research Center of the Gifted and Talented may be helpful. Make sure that the:

- ✓ evaluation serves the practical information needed by the targeted audiences,
- ✓ evaluation is realistic (politically and pragmatically) and cost-effective,
- ✓ evaluation is conducted in an ethical manner,
- ✓ evaluation is as accurate as possible,
- ✓ program documentation exists,
- ✓ review covers as many relevant data sources as possible,
- ✓ evaluation compares the program's stated goals with the actual performance,
- ✓ evaluation describes and assesses the climate,
- ✓ evaluation includes talking to students,
- ✓ program finances are reviewed, and
- ✓ community and school board components are included in the evaluation.

Process of program development and renewal

The process of program development and renewal is an ongoing cycle involving the community and its resources. The best program is built by dedicated and concerned individuals working as a team to educate our students by integrating the best methods from the past, present and future. This is dedication for continuous improvement.

For information, analysis and evaluation of instruments used in the identification of gifted students or in the evaluation of gifted programs contact:

The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented
Data Base Requests
Curry School of Education
405 Emmet Street
University of Virginia
Charlottesville, VA 22903
TEL (804)982-2849

For more information on program evaluation:

Borland, James H., Planning and Implementing Programs for the Gifted, Teachers College Press, 1989, pp.195-219

Callahan, Carolyn; Evaluations Lectures, Project EDGE, Montana OPI, 1992 (available on videotape)

Criteria for Excellent Programs for Highly Capable Students: A Gifted and Talented Students' Program Guide, Montana Office of Public Instruction, 1994

Program Assessment: a Six-Step Process to Curriculum Improvement, Montana Office of Public Instruction, 1990

*The purpose of a retrospective review of anything—be it a basketball team, a marriage, a political party, or an educational program—should not be to wallow in the past, remembering only the good things and forgetting the bad. Rather it should be a springboard to the future. It has often been said that 'You can't know where you're going if you don't know where you've been'.
—James J. Gallagher
NCAGT/PAGE
Conference
Opening Session
Keynote address
Education of Gifted Students:
Retrospective and Prospective
March 19, 1993*